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Capps' Bill to Help ALS Patients Congress

Capps Celebrates Victory With Tom Rogers, the Inspiration Behind Capps' Bill

Santa Barbara, CA -- Congresswoman Lois Capps today celebrated the passage of her bill to give ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) patients immediate Medicare coverage after diagnosis with Tom Rogers, a former Santa Barbara County Supervisor, who is courageously fighting ALS.

Capps and Rogers were joined by Dr. Karl Sandin, Rogers' physician and Medical Director of the Institute of Rehabilitation at Santa Barbara, and Debi Klein, Executive Director of the ALS Greater Los Angeles Chapter. Capps' legislation is the first to address ALS, also commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

"I'm so pleased to have introduced and passed the first bill to help ALS patients," said Capps. "Providing Medicare coverage to ALS disabled patients will help ease the burden for thousands of patients and families struggling with this devastating disease."

The key provision of Capps' bill, H.R. 353, The ALS Treatment and Assistance Act, was included in the omnibus appropriations bill Congress passed Friday. It waives the 24-month waiting period for Medicare benefits for ALS disabled patients. This waiver is critical because the average life expectancy following diagnosis is often shorter than the waiting period. New Jersey Senator Robert Torricelli sponsored companion legislation in the Senate. Capps' bill -- which had 282 bipartisan cosponsors -- was first authored by Capps' late husband Walter in honor of their close personal friend Tom Rogers. Walter Capps befriended Rogers while recovering from a serious car accident at the Institute of Rehabilitation at Santa Barbara.

"This effort started long before me. It started with my husband Walter Capps and his good friend Tom Rogers, who was the inspiration behind this bill," said Capps. "Tom is a true hero in every sense of the word. He is in my heart every day. This bill, for me, is about Tom Rogers and thousands of other ALS patients and their families living with this disease."

The ALS Association actively campaigned to pass Capps' legislation, including sponsoring an annual advocacy day at the Capitol. "The ALS Association is extremely grateful to bill authors Congresswoman Lois Capps and Senator Robert Torricelli for their determined efforts on behalf of the ALS community," stated Mike Havlicek, president of The ALS Association. "Their stewardship of this bill, along with the bipartisan support of their colleagues, helped ratify this first-ever ALS-specific legislation to help those affected by the disease."

The bill will be signed by the president in the upcoming week.

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